

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8642

INFO USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

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CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, CH

SUBJ: OPERA MAY ALLUDE TO CHOU

SUMMARY. PEKING'S LATEST OPERA HINTS AT PREMIER CHOU AS THE REAL LIFE PERSONAGE OF THE LEADING MALE CHARACTER, A SYMPATHETIC BUT ERRANT REBEL LEADER, WHO IS SAVED FROM HIS MISTAKES BY A WOMAN PARTY FIGURE--WHO COULD BE CHIANG CHING. END SUMMARY.

1. IT IS POSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY PREMIER CHOU AS THE REAL LIFE PERSONAGE OF A SYMPATHETIC BUT ERRANT CHARACTER IN THE PRC'S LATEST OPERA. THIS COULD MAKE THE OPERA POTENTIALLY ONE OF THE MOST POLITICALLY-RELEVANT THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS IN CHINA SINCE THE PLAY "HAI JUI DISMISSED FROM OFFICE" FEATURED IN THE LAUNCHING OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION. MORE IMMEDIATELY, IT ADDS TO INDICATIONS THAT CHOU IS IMPORTANTLY CAUGHT UP IN PEKING'S CURRENT POLITICAL INFIGHTING, ALONG WITH MAO'S WIFE CHIANG CHING, PATRONESS OF THE OPERA.

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2. THE CHARACTER IN QUESTION IS THE MALE LEAD IN THE OPERA

"TUCHUAN MOUNTAIN," THE TEXT OF WHICH IS NOW AVAILABLE HERE (RED FLAG NO. 10). HE IS A HEADSTRONG PEASANT LEADER WHOSE EFFORTS AT ARMED UPRISINGS ARE UNSUCCESSFUL UNTIL HE IS JOINED BY A WOMAN PARTY REPRESENTATIVE SENT TO ADVISE HIM. SHE MANAGES, JUST BARELY AND BY SOME DOING, TO SAVE HIM FROM HIS MISTAKES, BUT THEY ARE COSTLY AND INCLUDE THE DEATH OF A FELLOW PARTISAN. (THE DEATH PROMPTS A SPEECH OF SELF-CRITICISM BY THE PEASANT LEADER THAT IS SO PENITENT AS TO SUGGEST A REAL LIFE IDENTITY EXISTS FOR THE DEAD MAN.) THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT ABOUT THE IDENTITY OF THE OPERA'S VILLAIN, AS USLO PEKING COMMENTED UPON SEEING THE OPERA EARLIER (PEKING 0374); HE IS THE HIDDEN TRAITOR WHO HAS FEATURED IN NEW OPERAS SINCE THE FALL OF LIN PIAO. IN A NEW WRINKLE, HOWEVER, HE DOES NOT END UP A PRISONER THIS TIME. IN ONE OF THE MORE CURIOUS BITS OF RECENT STAGE DIRECTION WE HAVE SEEN, THE PEASANT LEADER, WHO HAS THE VILLAIN IN HIS GRASP, PUSHES HIM AWAY. THE VILLAIN THINKS HE HAS BEEN LET GO TO ESCAPE (WHY HE SHOULD THINK THAT IS UNEXPLAINED AND HARD TO FATHOM, BUT THAT IS WHAT THE SCRIPT SAYS HE THINKS. DID LIN PIAO THINK HE WAS BEING ALLOWED TO ESCAPE?) THE VILLAIN TURNS AND RUNS. THE PEASANT LEADER SHOOTS HIM AND HE PLUMMETS OVER THE EDGE OF A CLIFF.

3. THE PASSAGE THAT POINTS TO CHOU AS THE PEASANT LEADER IS AN INCIDENTAL ONE, BUT ITS CURRENT POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE SEEMS TO US HEIGHTENED BY THE DISPENSABILITY OF THE PASSAGE TO THE PLOT. THE WOMAN PARTY REPRESENTATIVE HAS BEEN WEAVING STRAW SANDALS FOR THE PARTISANS. SHE MAKES THE PEASANT LEADER EXPOSE HIS FOOT, SHOWING THAT HIS OWN SANDALS ARE WORN THROUGH. "HOW MIGHTY THE COMMANDER LOOKS. THE SANDALS HE WEARS HAVE NO SOLES," LAUGH THE PARTISANS. THE ALLUSION ALMOST CERTAINLY IS TO A WELL-KNOWN STORY ABOUT CHOU'S SHOES WEARING OUT IN THE LONG MARCH-YENAN DAYS. THE CLINCHER CAN BE FOUND IN AN ACCOUNT OF THE EVENT, "IN HIS MIND A MILLION BOLD WARRIORS," WIDELY REPUBLISHED BY PEKING FOLLOWING THE FALL OF LIN PIAO. "VICE CHAIRMAN CHOU, YOUR SOCKS ARE SHOWING THROUGH THE SOLES OF YOUR SHOES." THE SPEAKER IN THAT ACCOUNT IS IDENTIFIED AS CHIANG CHING. OSBORN

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